Generative Art

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Abstract

As an artist, I have the freedom to subject myself to restrictive rules that may run close to what is understood by a ‘program’ in computer science. Sentences like: ‘use only vertical strokes of roughly the same length’, ‘go to and fro along a given contour’, ‘draw a tree with short, violent strokes’, etc., are examples for such ‘programs’. In Generative Art (for a definition see, for example, Galanter, 2003), explicit use is made of such rules. I describe my attempts as ‘an art practice where the artist follows a self-designed system of formal rules’ (Dehlinger, 2007). Working manually on a physical piece in statu nascendi, artists have an immediate feedback on the impact of any stroke or action they perform. Not so in Generative Art. Here an idea or a concept is in the focus for which a specific production system is designed that will turn out an aesthetic event. The artist, the inventor of the generative system, then judges it. The strictness of the rules and the precision in their execution performed by the computer are unparalleled. But, in my eyes the machine does not conceive the art. The artistic intelligence/creativity is seated facing the computer and not within it. Accepting the computer as part of the art making equation, artists are granted the privilege to explore totally new and hitherto unknown domains. Generative Art has a strong relation to design. But contrary to design proper, where usually one (in the eyes of the designer the optimal) instance for implementation is searched for, the emphasis in Generative Art is on the plural. The generating system – and this is a wanted effect – is in principle able to supply an endless sequence of differing results, all within the constraining rules set out – a fantastic playground for art. The problematic issues on programming for art related themes in architecture, design and art have engaged me since I started with programming with Algol 68 in the early 60ies as a student of architecture at the University of Stuttgart, Germany. As students of architecture we also were part of a multidisciplinary Studium generale listening to the lectures on aesthetics of the philosopher Max Bense. It was in this context where I first encountered the computer art pioneer Frieder Nake, working on a Zuse-Graphomat. In 1969, I entered the UC Berkeley as a graduate student thanks to a scholarship by DAAD. And, an unforgettable experience shortly after my arrival was an extensive visit of the Cybernetic Serendipidy exhibition at the San Francisco Exploratorium (Reichardt, 1968).